

Philadelphia, PA — Representatives Joe Sestak (PA-7) and Robert Andrews (NJ-1) held a joint press conference today announcing a Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation into the cost, operational efficiency, and environmental impacts of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) proposed Metropolitan Area Airspace Redesign.

At Representatives Sestak and Andrews' request, the GAO will be investigating the costs, operational efficiencies, and environmental impacts the FAA's proposed redesign of the airspace covering the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia region due to community concerns that noise mitigation, air emissions, and other environmental impacts may not have been adequately addressed.

"I have worked aggressively with Congressman Andrews and leaders in Congress, as well as at the state and local level, to address the concerns my constituents have over the noise and environmental impact of this redesign," said Congressman Sestak. "I've said all along that the FAA's Draft Environmental Impact Statement is based on flawed models and assumptions. This study conducted by GAO will give us much needed information and guidance into whether there are grounds for stopping the FAA Airspace Redesign Project in its entirety. In 2002, a GAO study suspended a Delaware River dredging project as flaws in the project's cost-benefit analysis were revealed. This GAO report will serve as an accountability study of whether a true cost-benefit analysis was done, as my Expert Advisory Board's study indicated it was not. Therefore, it will serve to halt this project until a true cost-benefit analysis is done, which forces the FAA to look at other options."

"Representative Sestak and I have asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct an investigation into the cost and noise and environmental impact of the airspace redesign on South Jersey and Pennsylvania because we do not think the FAA has provided accurate answers on its own," said Representative Andrews. "I'm extremely concerned that this air space redesign is a colossal mistake. The GAO study will finally provide us with the information we need to determine whether there is any merit to the FAA's proposal."

On Friday, April 20, Congressman Sestak and Andrews met with FAA Administrator Marion

Blakey, in the latest of a series of meetings that Congressman Sestak organized with FAA officials. During this meeting, Congressman Andrews asked, ‘How much would the FAA airspace redesign cost?’ The answer--‘We don’t know,’ which Congressman Sestak finds troubling and fiscally irresponsible.

“Up until now, the FAA has had a free ride. This is about having the government’s watchdog review the FAA’s process and conclusions,” said Congressman Sestak. “We will find through this study that the FAA’s airspace redesign proposal was poorly thought out and with an unsupportable conclusion. Therefore, it will have to be redone—this time appropriately.”

The D.O.T. Inspector General (IG) Report on the FAA redesign from May 2005 indicated that the FAA has already spent upwards of \$50 million on the FAA airspace redesign project, and the only estimate for the project provided to the public by the FAA is a \$250 million figure in 1997. Additionally, the 2005 IG report noted that the “costs and schedule estimates for the vast majority of airspace redesign projects are not reliable. Cost estimates—for the program as well as individual projects—include costs only for planning, not for implementation.”

In particular, the GAO investigation is charged with answering the following questions:

1. What are the key elements of FAA’s airspace redesign proposal for the NY/NJ/PHL region, including the cost and schedule for implementing the proposal?
2. To what extent are the cost and schedule estimates for the NY/NJ/PHL airspace redesign project valid and reliable?
3. To what extent did FAA consider and address the potential environmental impacts of its redesign proposal on the local communities in the NY/NJ/PHL region?
4. What are some potential lessons to be learned from the NY/NJ/PHL project for improving FAA’s processes for developing airspace redesigns?

“This GAO report will give us much needed information to really know how the FAA redesign will affect our communities,” Sestak stated. “I intend to ensure that any impact on the safety, health, education, and property values of Delaware County residents as a result of the FAA Airspace Redesign are fully identified and mitigated, and that all noise and its impact on Delaware County residents is eliminated. I will also work on legislation during the FAA re-authorization to stop the FAA airspace proposal in its tracks until a true cost-benefit analysis is completed, and will support litigation as necessary to help us achieve the goal of stopping the current proposal.”

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